

Surgery Helping Some Children

by Sonni Schwin

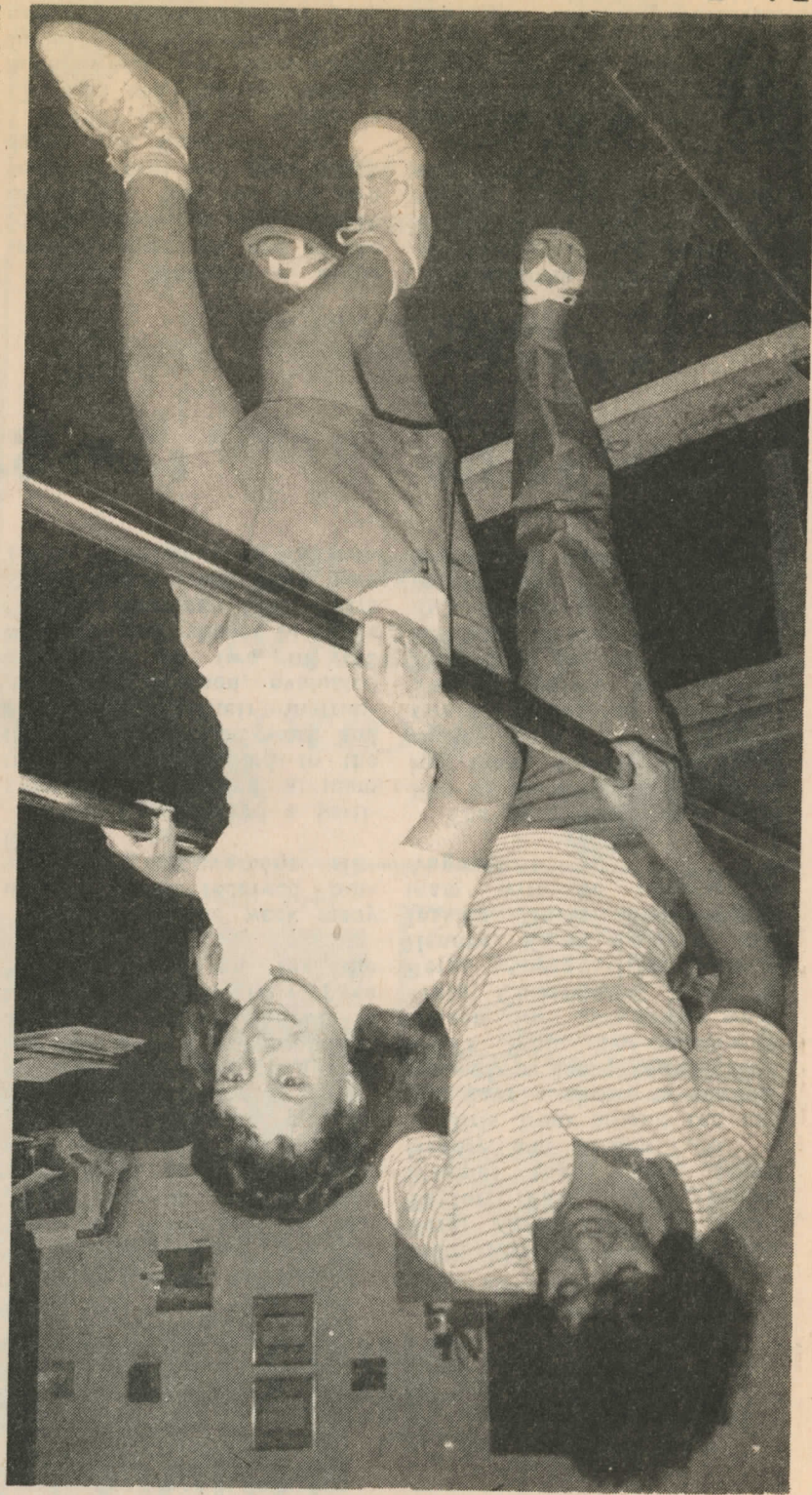
A new surgical procedure is making it possible for some children with cerebral palsy to improve their gait and walk more easily, and for some, like 13-year-old Erin Eckenrode, to walk without crutches. She's gone to dances and done the best she could on crutches. But now she looks forward to the day when she'll be able to dance like other teenagers.

Erin is one of the lucky 15 to 20 percent of kids with cerebral palsy who can benefit from the new procedure, called selective dorsal rhizotomy. She is also lucky that it was developed before she became too old to qualify as a candidate.

Cerebral palsy results when brain fibers that direct motor cells are damaged, explained "Jack" Walker, M.D.,

March at Primary Children's Medical Center in Salt Lake City. He learned the procedure two years ago in South Africa from the man who developed it, Dr. Warwick Peacock, who is now chairman of the Division of Pediatric Neurosurgery at UCLA. Dr. Walker has performed the surgery on 24 kids and says of their parents, "They're the happiest I have in my practice."

Although he was the first to use the procedure in the United States, others are studying it and "it's spreading quite rapidly," he said. He explained there are nerve cells in the spinal cord which send and receive messages. They are connected to muscles by sensory nerves which inform them of muscle movement. In response, the cells exit the muscles, commanding them to contract. There is a "sort of reflex arc" that continually excites the muscle, causing it to be in a constant state of contraction. Fibers from the brain deliver messages to the nerve cells which inhibit the com-



Erin Eckenrode, with the help of her friend and physical therapist Rolayne Mattison, has thrown away her crutches, thanks to a new surgery that has freed her from the spasticity of cerebral palsy. It won't be long before she'll be able to dance... and ride her new bicycle without assistance.

[illegible]

Dr. Walker explained that during the five-hour surgery he uses magnifying loops or operating microscopes. He splits each sensory nerve therefore, continually excite corresponding nerve cells, "contract" messages. The no interference with the damaged brain cells, there is

muscle is locked into contraction. A spastic limb can't move gradually from a closed to open position so it simply locks into one position. In most cases, the limb is positioned so it simply locks into one position.

"If we just sent them home and said 'good luck,' they would continue to walk exactly as they did before. For instance, when she was lying down and wanted to roll over, she had to call me."

The handicapped skiing program. A special device was attached to the toes of her skis to keep them from crossing and with outer rollers.

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"In normal development, you learn a lot of movement through repetition," Ms. Mattison explained. "Hold a baby seven-month-old baby at the Children's Medical Center. They first met at Primary nine years, took it from there. and physical therapist for Ms. Mattison, Erin's friend and physical therapist for nine years, took it from there. They first met at Primary Children's Medical Center. Erin again is back at the trail full speed ahead."

Megan Pugh — Meg has been dancing in the Fannies Fall. She enjoys dancing, Grace at Central School and

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